Prairie Update

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# Women on the Range: The Third Annual Southwest Ladies' Grazing Workshop

by Krista Connick Todd – Agrologist, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority
Julie MacKenzie – Watershed Advisor, Provincial Council of ADD Boards

When you walk into the typical ranching workshop, you expect to hear gruff, manly voices talking about the weather and the price of cattle, not a room full of giggling ladies swapping stories about backing up the stock trailer! On August 6th and 7th, ladies from across the southwest gathered in Val Marie for the 3rd Annual Ladies' Grazing Workshop hosted by the Agri-Environmental Services Branch (formerly PFRA), the Provincial Council of ADD Boards (PCAB), and the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority (SWA).

This year's workshop focused on wintering site management. Wintering livestock tends to be the most expensive and labour-intensive component of an operation. Components of the workshop focused on different feeding options, alternative water systems, and wintering livestock with less impact on the environment.

"In the past, cattle were always wintered close to creeks, sloughs, coulees and the sensitive riparian areas around them," says Julie MacKenzie, a Watershed Advisor with PCAB. "We now realize that these areas are really important for clean water and recharging ground water, so producers are coming up with innovative ideas to winter cattle elsewhere."

**Learning to identify native plants was one of the many topics covered during the two-day workshop.**

Many ladies think they are the only woman doing this type of work– well, they found out that they are not alone, but in a class of their own!

Sophi Kress ranches near Mankota, and is relatively new to the livestock industry. She said that she was drawn to this particular workshop because the topics were so practical.

"It was a great opportunity to meet women who are successful in their 'businesses' and who are willing to share how they got to be that way!" said Kress. Kress added that she walked away from the workshop with new knowledge, including different ideas for successful, economic options for feeding cattle in the winter months, distinguishing between different plant species, and how to use a handheld GPS device.

"These ladies are tough– they work hard, are passionate about what they do, and have a great sense of humour– something they all agreed you need," says MacKenzie. "They all contribute something different to their operations, but a common passion runs through all of them. Many work with spouses, while others are the primary operator themselves."

Organizer Krista Connick Todd of the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority adds, "This is our third annual grazing school with lots of repeat gals. We try to make this a mini-holiday for the ladies. We hope they head home with tonnes of great ideas, and that they feel rejuvenated and ready to tackle all the daily challenges of ranching."

This year's agenda was based on feedback given from the year before. Topics included Animal Health 101, Budgeting on One Yearly Pay Cheque, What your Native Plants are Telling You, and Animal Nutrition.

Funding for this workshop was provided by Growing Forward, a Government of Canada and Government of Saskatchewan partnership through PCAB's Watershed Awareness Initiative.

Plans are already in the works for the next workshop in 2010, which will focus on summer grazing rotations and implementing beneficial management practices related to pasture management and species at risk.

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# Rafferty and Alameda Reservoirs: A Partnership in Land Stewardship

by Gary Neil – Manager, Planning and Lands Management, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

While many people may not realize it, the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority owns 18,638 hectares (46,055 acres) of land surrounding the Rafferty and Alameda Reservoirs in southeast Saskatchwan. Recently, the Watershed Authority and the Saskatchewan Widlife Federation launched a joint project to develop a management plan focused on protecting wildlife habitat and keeping the land healthy and productive.

The Watershed Authority aquired the lands around the reservoirs for two purposes:

1. Land control, to enable the construction of the reservoirs; and
2. As mitigation for the effects of flooding the valley bottoms, in terms of the wildlife habitat that was lost.

**Cattle graze the Rafferty basin perimeter lands near Estevan.**

The lands around the perimeter of the basin are predominantly native prairie, and have been managed by leasing them to local landowners for livestock grazing. Stocking rates are set by the Watershed Authority at a modest .35 animal unit months per acre.

The remainder of the lands are referred to as the wildlife mitigation lands. These lands were acquired as a result of a Federal Court Order in 1989, where the original Federal licence to create the reservoirs was repealed. The licence was later reissued, and included direction to the Province to mitigate the loss of land in the valley bottoms that was known to be important to wildlife.

At the time, these wildlife mitigation lands were mostly cultivated farm fields. They were subsequently enhanced for wildlife through an ambitious grass, shrub and tree planting strategy which began in 1992 and spanned a decade. The lands were envisioned to provide replacement habitat primarily for white-tailed deer and sharp-tailed grouse, but also for a host of common species endemic to the area, as well as for the threatened ferruginous hawk and the formerly at-risk Baird's sparrow.

As with the lands around the perimeter of the reservoir basins, the wildlife mitigation lands are managed primarily by leasing them to local landowners for livestock grazing. Bob Springer is an Agrologist with the Watershed Authority, and has been the land manager for two years.

"To keep tame and native forage stands healthy and productive, periodic disturbance is necessary. The most sustainable management tool at our disposal is managed grazing by livestock. And while there's always something we can improve on, generally I think the lands are in pretty good condition," he says.

Local branches of the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation have expressed interest in ensuring that the land use practices being employed on the widlife mitigation lands are compatible with wildlife production. In response, the Watershed Authority proposed a partnership with the Federation to evaluate the health of the lands, culminating in the creation of a plan to guide land management into the future.

Through the partnership, the Federation provided the Watershed Authority with funding to hire seasonal biologists to perform range, riparian and tree plantation surveys, as well as to study wildlife populations and trends.

The field data will be considered along with land management science to create a set of strategic recommendations. The Federation and other stakeholders are being invited to provide input during this process.

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**Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation Executive Director Darrell Crabbe (left) and Gary Neil, Manager of Planning and Lands Management for the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority, sign the Rafferty Alameda Crown Land Management Strategy funding agreement.**

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The Watershed Authority will then publish the finalized Rafferty– Alameda Crown Land Management Strategy by the end of the year.

"I earnestly believe this land management review and the creation of a long-term management strategy is important to sustain the wildlife conservation, outdoor recreation and watershed protection values and objectives that the Federation and the Watershed Authority share," concludes Gary Neil, Manager of Planning and Lands Management for the Watershed Authority.

**Biologists Karlah Rudolph and Norma Rosengren perform a range health assessment adjacent to Rafferty Reservoir.**

# Climate Change Dictionary

by Jeremy Pittman – Climate Change Adaptation Specialist, Saskatchewan Watershed Authority

References to "climate change" are everywhere. You see it mentioned in newspapers, websites, television broadcasts, political speeches and so on. Attached to the term climate change are a number of concepts that are frequently heard but seldom explicitly defined. The purpose of this article is to provide some working definitions of the various terms being used.

**Weather** is day-to-day variations in temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind speed/direction, and other indices. It is unstable and changing in nature. Weather is the outcome of an almost chaotic array of atmospheric processes operating on various timescales.

**Climate** is a statistical/scientific concept that refers to the average of all weather events over a long time period (usually 30 years). The period from 1961 to 1990, for instance, is often used to characterise "normal" climate for a particular region. Put another way, "climate is what you expect, while weather is what you get." [1]

**Climate Change** refers to shifts in long-term average climate, which implies changes in weather patterns. Climate has changed many times throughout history. Current concerns over climate change stem from the possibility of climates changing too quickly for us to adjust.

**Mitigation** refers to removing the causes of climate change to reduce risk. Mitigation usually assumes current climate change is largely human-induced, and therefore aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Scientific climate modelling suggests that even if all greenhouse gas emissions ceased abruptly, climate would continue to change at high rates due to current greenhouse gas levels and the other factors driving our climate, which presents the need for adaptation.

**Adaptation** means adjusting operations or activities to better cope with the negative impacts of climate change, and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Adaptation can be undertaken in advance of or in response to climatic stimuli, such as droughts, floods, rain, hail, solar radiation, growing degree days, and many others. Mitigation attempts to "avoid the unmanageable," while adaptation attempts to "manage the unavoidable." [2]

**Coping Range** refers to the amount of variation in different indices (e.g. temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind speed/direction, etc.) an operation is equipped to deal with. For instance, many cattle operations in the southwest could likely withstand a two-year drought, while a three year drought may be devastating. These operations, then, would have a coping range of two years for drought. Coping ranges can be increased through adaptation, so if these operations possessed adequate adaptive capacities, they could potentially increase their coping range for drought to three years.

**Adaptive Capacity** is the degree to which a producer is capable of modifying their operation. Indicators of adaptive capacity vary between producers and regions, but generally experience, education, technology, adequate government programs, and sound management techniques increase adaptive capacity. Effective application of adaptive capacity leads to increased coping ranges and reduced vulnerability to climate change.

1 Climate Change Information for Effective Adaptation: A Practitioner's Manual, GTZ, 2009

2 Climate Change Information for Effective Adaptation: A Practitioner's Manual, GTZ, 2009

# Hello Voluntary Stewards!

OOPS!

You may have noticed that the last newsletter you received had your address, but the wrong name, on the label. That was caused by a database error that has since been corrected. Thanks for your patience as we switch to a new mailing service, which will help us save money and reduce waste by eliminating the need for envelopes.

As always, we look forward to hearing your questions, comments, or suggestions for articles you would like to see in future editions of this newsletter.

You can contact me at (306) 787-8707 or jennifer.lohmeyer@swa.ca

*Jennifer Lohmeyer*

## Coming Events

For more information on stewardship events near you, please contact the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority office nearest you:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **North Battleford** | Jeremy Brown | 446-7460 |
| **Regina** | Etienne Soulodre | 787-0661 |
| **Swift Current** | Krista Connick | 778-8280 |
| | Bob Springer | 778-8301 |
| **Weyburn** | Stacey Gulka | 848-2354 |
| **Yorkton** | Jason Puckett | 786-5845 |

## Visit Us Online!

You can find more information on the Saskatchewan Watershed Authority's Prairie Stewardship Program in back issues of this newsletter.

These issues, as well as interactive maps featuring other stewardship project demonstration sites, can be viewed on our website, www.swa.ca.

## Our Gracious Supporters

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*Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture*

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